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Martha Rountree
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POWERS VINDICATED

MARTHA ROUNTREE: "U-2 pilot, Francis Gary Powers has had his day in court. It has been a rewarding one. After having undergone intensive questioning, including a lie detector test, the CIA, as well as the Senate Armed Services Committee says Powers fulfilled his obligations to the CIA, he conducted himself as a good American, and he did all he could do to carry out instructions.

"For over 20 months, we have heard people abuse Powers for not committing suicide. As a matter of fact a lot of people have wanted to hang him, and then give him a fair trial which seems much more un-American than the accusations they were levelling at Powers, without knowing the real story. We are happy Francis Powers has been vindicated, and we were praying all along that he was in the right. Because we dislike to believe the worst about people until the facts are in. Perhaps one of the faults too many have is the talent for jumping to conclusions--the lack of compassion for our fellow man.

"If Powers had done anything wrong, or un-American, we too would have been the first to want to disown him. However, the boys who risk their lives on the dangerous missions so important to the security of the United States are no less heroes than those who contribute in the many different ways through our accomplishments. How many people have you heard say, 'Why didn't Powers kill himself?' We commented here on Capital Closeup not too long ago that it was not easy for a God-fearing person to take their life, and that we knew of no regulation that required suicide in the event of capture. Today this was confirmed.

"Even Senator Richard Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he had not known that Powers was not under contract to kill himself. Powers said it was his option, whether to take a poison pin with him on the flight for suicide in case he was captured. Said Powers, 'I chose to take it.' The CIA head, John A. McCone advised the House and Senate Subcommittees yesterday that Powers actually had instructions to do what he could do to save his own life, if shot down or captured. The much talked about poison needle which figured prominently at the trial, was taken along in case of torture, or where Powers at his own discretion might choose suicide.

"Also CIA Director John McCone told the Congressional Committees today that the U-2 pilots were not spies. As he explained it, they were chosen for their aviation proficiency, physical stamina, emotional stability, and of course, personal security. Said McCone, they were not selected or trained as espionage agents, and the whole nature of the mission was far removed from the traditional espionage scene. Their job was to fly the plane, and it was so demanding an assignment, said McCone, that on completion of a mission, physical fatigue was a hazard on landing.

"According to the testimony this afternoon, Powers could not have done things any differently. He was, and is still, a good American, according to everyone, and he has been completely vindicated, and he remains, according to the CIA, on the employee list, and will so remain indefinitely."